



Update From Senator Cornyn

May 2005

The 109th Congress is well underway, and during the months of March and April the Senate worked to pass several important pieces of legislation to grow the economy and increase jobs in Texas and across the nation, including lawsuit abuse and class action reform measures, as well as approving the budget blueprint presented to us by the President. The judicial nominations process continues to be a contentious and highly charged debate, and two of the President's judicial nominees have been forwarded for consideration by the full Senate, including Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen who has been blocked for four years. In the month ahead we will likely turn our attention to highway legislation, attempting to provide continued resources for critical transportation infrastructure, and I'll continue pushing for Texas to get its fair share of funding. We'll also work on a defense authorization bill to assure our continued commitment to homeland security and providing our troops the necessary resources to fight and win the war on terror. As always, I appreciate hearing from you so that I may continue to address the issues that matter most to Texans.

Supporting Texas Military as Transformation Moves Forward

Working with military officials and leaders throughout the state, as well as here in Washington, I continue to highlight the many benefits of Texas military facilities. I have met with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and other top military officials on several occasions to make the case for our installations. It is expected that next week the Department of Defense will announce its recommendations for Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) as part of the efforts to transform and modernize our military capabilities in this age of terror. During this next phase of BRAC, I will continue to promote the many benefits of training in Texas, including our climate, space, strong community support and resources, and to urge the return of more troops to our state.

First-hand Work for Texans

My travel to Texas this week included a trip to Ellington Field in Houston, and Fort Bliss in El Paso, to be briefed on operations and to update leadership on my work to secure continued support for these military installations. I also highlighted the strong community support that both of these facilities enjoy from local elected officials, other leaders, and ordinary citizens.

To mark the beginning of **Cover the Uninsured Week**, as a member of the Task Force on Health Care Costs and the Uninsured, I hosted a roundtable with state and local health care leaders in Austin as part of an ongoing effort to seek ways to make health care more accessible and affordable. An estimated 27 percent of Texans are uninsured at some point in a year – and the uninsured have few options for preventive care such as check-ups, mammograms, and screenings. Minor illnesses become costly as care is delayed, causing patients to resort to the emergency room as their only option – which is more expensive for all of us. Because community health centers are such an important part of access to care for the uninsured, I continue to visit facilities across the state, working to increase the number of Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers (FQHCs) and support the ones already existing.

For more information:
http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/record_jc.cfm?id=226625

Partisanship and the Nominations Process, Continued

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted to send the nomination of my former colleague, Texas **Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen**, as well as that of California Supreme Court Associate Justice Janice Rogers Brown, for consideration by the full Senate, which could come this month. Justice Brown is a woman of outstanding accomplishment and ability, and Justice Owen—with whom I served on the Texas Supreme Court—is one of the finest legal minds of our time. She has a superlative record and outstanding reputation.

Though a bipartisan majority of the Senate stood ready to confirm these nominees last Congress, a partisan minority obstructed the process and refused to allow the nominations to be heard by the full Senate. Owen was first nominated by President Bush four years ago, on May 9, 2001. This obstruction is wrong and must be stopped. My hope is that we will restore the 200-year tradition of majority rule, and simply allow a bipartisan majority to confirm judicial nominees.

For more information:
<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=236719>

Border Security and Immigration

As chairman of the Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship subcommittee, I continue to lead an important and extensive evaluation of our broken immigration system and the nation's border and homeland security. As part of that review, I have co-chaired three hearings so far in an ongoing series which examined: **the need for better training for border inspectors**; ensuring document security and integrity; finding and closing gaps in the visa system; **interior enforcement**, including detention and deportation; **border security between authorized ports of entry**; and the use of technology to protect the borders.

Immigration reform is a challenge I find long overdue, as our post-9/11 world makes border security one of our most urgent responsibilities. I have been working with my colleague Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), and together we soon will introduce legislation that will dramatically strengthen enforcement, bolster border security, and comprehensively reform our immigration laws. I welcome your comments regarding this important issue.

For more information:

<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=233604>

<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=236438>

<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=237084>

Making Government Information More Accessible to the Public

As part of an ongoing and bipartisan effort to achieve meaningful reforms to the **Freedom of Information Act of 1966 (FOIA)**, I chaired a **hearing** of the Judiciary subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security in March to seek ways of making government information more accessible to the public. The panel heard testimony on the need to strengthen current laws and increase response times to FOIA requests. We examined the merits of the bipartisan **Openness Promotes Effectiveness in our National Government Act of 2005 (OPEN Government Act)**, which I introduced last month with my colleague, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.).

This legislation (S. 394) is aimed at substantially enhancing and expanding the accessibility, accountability, and openness of the federal government, and enjoys wide support from groups across the political and ideological spectrum. In addition, I have introduced the **Faster FOIA Act of 2005**, which would establish an advisory commission charged with reporting to Congress and the President recommendations to reduce delays of processing FOIA requests. This bill has already been approved by the Judiciary Committee, and I hope the full Senate will pass it soon. As it has been nearly a decade since Congress has approved major reforms to FOIA, I hope these efforts strengthen our open-government laws and reinforce our national commitment to freedom of information.

For more information:

<http://cornyn.senate.gov/FOIA/>

http://cornyn.senate.gov/FOIA/rel_hearing.cfm

<http://cornyn.senate.gov/FOIA/FFOIA.cfm>

The Senate's Strong Record of Accomplishment in 2005

Congress has been successful in passing several significant legislative items this year. The Senate recently passed a final version of the next fiscal year budget for the federal government that provides for continued funding for national defense and homeland security, responsible spending restraint for discretionary spending to reduce the deficit in half by 2009, and provisions to extend the 2001/2003 tax bills to sustain the current economic expansion. The Senate also passed: The Class Action Fairness Act of 2005, which amends the procedures that apply to consideration of interstate class actions to assure fairer outcomes for class members and defendants; and The Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005, which is intended to curb the abuse of the current bankruptcy system and fix loopholes to ensure the system works more efficiently. On a related note, to reform the system that allowed Enron's forum-shopping, I introduced the **Fairness in Bankruptcy Litigation Act of 2005**, which will protect consumers, creditors, small businesses, and others affected by bankruptcy cases through reforming the rules governing where bankruptcy cases are heard. The **legislation** combats forum shopping by corporate debtors, and would prevent bankruptcy cases from moving thousands of miles away from the communities and their workers who have the most at stake, as happened in the Enron case.

For more information:

<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=232700>

<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=231927>

Come See Me

If you're traveling to Washington for business or pleasure, I would greatly appreciate the chance to say hello while you're here. I host an open house in my office, Hart Senate Office Building, Room 625, from 9:00 to 9:30 a.m. every Tuesday when the Senate is in session, so I can greet and talk with Texans. Please call Denise Pleasant, in my office, at (202) 224-2934 to let me know you'll be coming.

Best regards,

Senator John Cornyn

** If you know others who would like to receive my updates, please direct them to subscribe at my Senate web site, www.cornyn.senate.gov.

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More information on these issues is available on my Senate web site, www.cornyn.senate.gov. The site also includes press releases and other information that may be of interest to you.